

Reading

This article describes the invention of the Slinky, a toy that has been popular for more than 50 years. Read the article and then answer the questions that follow.

The Slinky Story

by Sharman Reed Price

Many toys that kids enjoy today weren't always toys—or at least they didn't start out that way. Some toys, like Play-Doh, originally had other uses. Because it was just sticky enough to remove smudges and dirt from wallpaper without damaging it, white Play-Doh was invented as a cleaning product. Silly Putty was discovered during World War II when scientists were trying desperately to find a much-needed substitute for rubber to use for tires and boots. Like those, the Slinky didn't start out as a toy—but it has become a favorite of kids all over the world.

The Slinky story began in 1945, after World War II. During the war, the United States Navy developed new instruments to help guide and navigate ships. These instruments were sensitive to movement. They did not work well in tossing, rocking ships traveling through rough seas. After the war, the Navy hired Richard James, a young engineer, to invent a stabilizing device to use with the instruments. A stabilizing device would cushion instruments during sudden movements and help them to work properly.

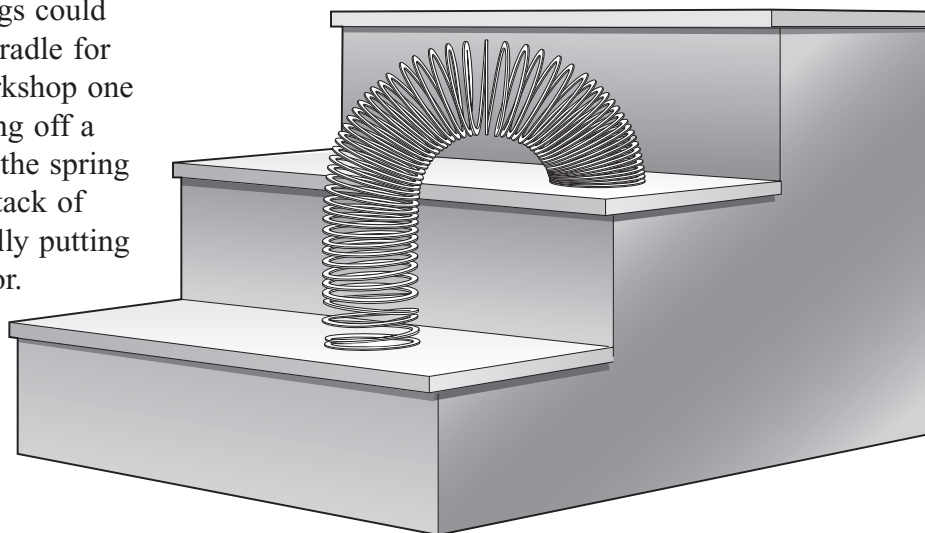
The engineer thought that springs would do the trick: they were light and flexible and a common product—it seemed that springs could be combined in some way to create a cradle for delicate machinery. In his crowded workshop one day, James accidentally knocked a spring off a shelf. Instead of clattering to the floor, the spring “walked” down—from the shelf, to a stack of books, to the desktop, to a chair...finally putting itself back together in a coil on the floor. James was fascinated. He made the spring “walk” again and again.

After work, Richard James brought a spring home to show the trick to his wife, Betty. Together, they tested the

spring in different places around their house. The results were always the same; the spring walked from place to place, using no power, batteries, or other devices. They found out that the spring was especially good at walking down stairs. Betty was the one who imagined this common, comical little spring for what it would eventually become—a toy. She came up with the perfect name: “Slinky.”

Richard and Betty James had to borrow money in order to make 400 of the original Slinkys. Their big break came when they persuaded the manager of Gimbel's, a large department store in Philadelphia, to let them demonstrate the toy. People watched, amused and amazed, as the spring did its tricks. Within 90 minutes, all 400 Slinkys had been sold—and people wanted more!

The rest, as the saying goes, is history. Richard and Betty James started their own company to produce Slinkys; within a few years, they were millionaires. Their manufacturing plant in Pennsylvania has been in operation for more than 50 years. So far, it has produced over 250 million Slinkys, enjoyed by kids and adults alike. The little spring with the funny name has walked the world over!



Reading

Some Slinky Facts

- It takes about 80 feet of wire to make a standard-sized Slinky.
- The cost of a Slinky today (about \$2) is only twice the cost of an original Slinky.
- Slinkys have gone into space: NASA has used them in zero-gravity physics experiments in the space shuttle.
- Many science teachers use Slinkys in their classrooms to demonstrate the behavior of light waves and sound waves.
- The Slinky is still manufactured in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania, with the original equipment Richard James invented.

Choose the best answer for each question. Mark your answer choices for multiple-choice questions 16 through 20 in the spaces provided on side 1 of your answer sheet.

ID:176955 Key: B Montana Standard 1

16. According to the first paragraph, Play-Doh, Silly Putty, and Slinky are alike because they were

- A. all discovered at the same time.
- B. not intended to be toys at first.
- C. made of the same kind of material.
- D. toys that were unpopular at first.

ID:176956 Key: A Montana Standard 2

17. How did the author compare the Slinky to a human being?

- A. by describing how the Slinky walked
- B. by telling about the Slinky's discovery
- C. by explaining how the Slinky worked
- D. by giving the Slinky a funny name

ID:176957 Key: C Montana Standard 2

Use the dictionary entry below to answer question 18.

break 1. to come apart or make something come apart by force 2. to stop; end 3. a sudden change 4. a short rest period

18. Which meaning of break is MOST like the meaning used in paragraph 5?

- A. definition 1
- B. definition 2
- C. definition 3
- D. definition 4

Reading

ID:176958 Key: D Montana Standard 1

19. From reading “Some Slinky Facts,” the reader can conclude that Slinkys are
- A. no longer manufactured.
 - B. made in different sizes.
 - C. still sold at Gimbel’s store.
 - D. used in the study of science.

ID:176960 Key: C Montana Standard 5

20. “The Slinky Story” is nonfiction because it is
- A. short.
 - B. made up.
 - C. true.
 - D. dramatic.